

P S
3523
O88
Z7
1921
MAIN

UC-NRLF

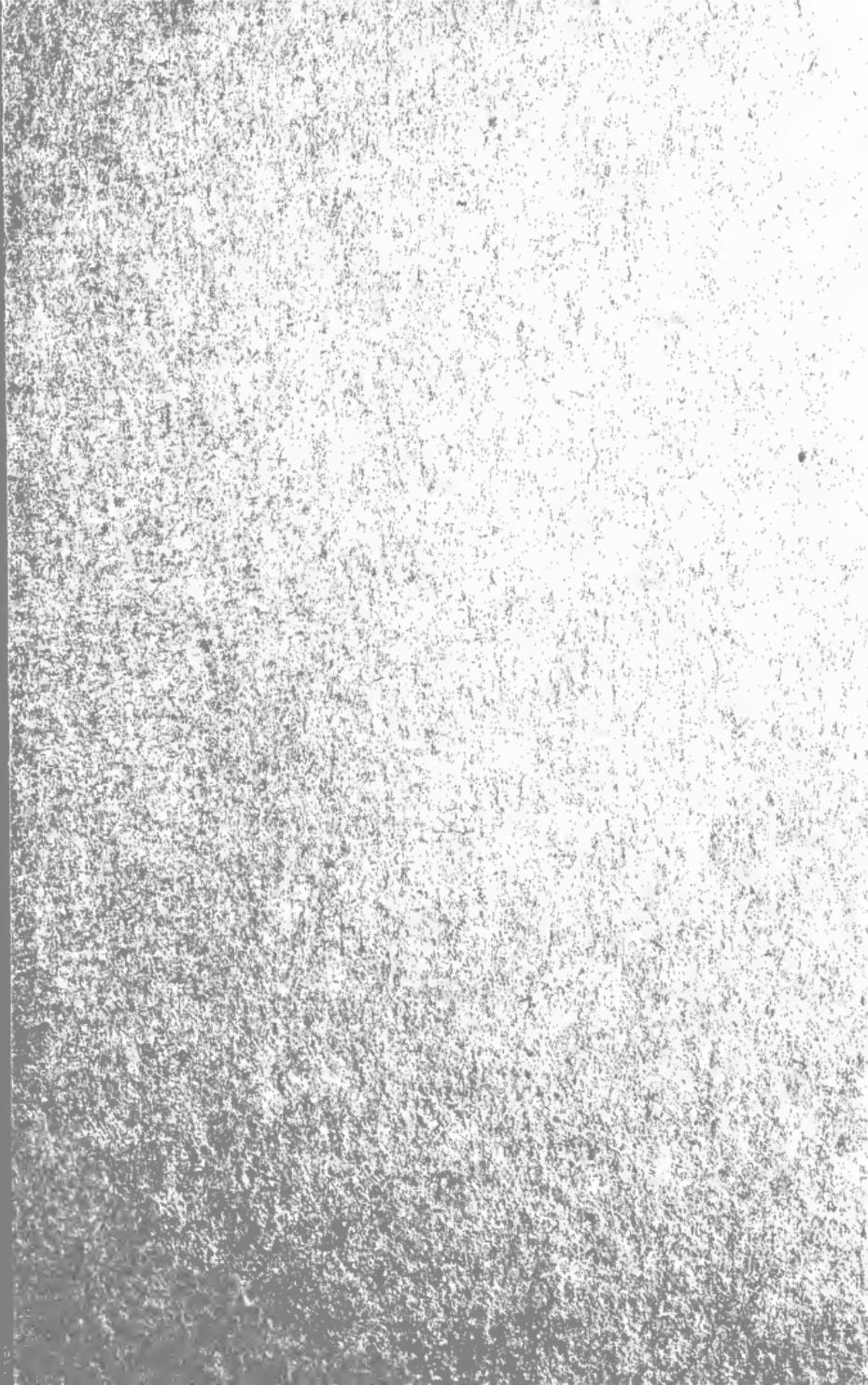


B 4 100 928



T 11 54237

54392





AMY LOWELL

Sketches Biographical and
Critical by

RICHARD HUNT

AND

ROYALL H. SNOW



Gift



Copyright, Moffett, 1916, Chicago

AMY LOWELL

P53523

888 Z7

L 917
H 1-1

1921

MAIN

AMY LOWELL

*A Sketch of Her Life and Her Place in
Contemporary American Literature*

BY RICHARD HUNT

THIS biographical résumé of Miss Amy Lowell is given in response to a desire on the part of many readers "to know something more" about the poet and critic whose genius has been such a stimulating element in the modern poetry renaissance.

The Lowell family seems to have had more than a normal quota of literary gentlemen. The first colonist, Percival Lowell, a merchant of Bristol, Somerset, England, who arrived in Newburyport in 1637, wrote an ode on the death of Governor Winthrop which contains the following naïve quatrain:

"Here you have Lowell's loyalty,
Penned with slender skill,
And with it no good poetry,
But certainly good will."

Miss Lowell's great-grandfather, John Lowell, a direct descendant of this gentleman, gained considerable local fame by his newspaper articles signed "The Boston Rebel" and "The Norfolk Farmer." The best-known literary man in the family was James Russell Lowell, the poet, who was a cousin of Miss

507589

Lowell's grandfather; Miss Lowell's brother, President A. Lawrence Lowell of Harvard University, as many people know, possesses the literary gift, as did her other brother, the late Professor Percival Lowell.

But, in the long run, Miss Lowell's ancestors of the direct line have been distinguished chiefly for a general good standing in business and the professions, and for an abundant energy which has led them into altruistic, scholarly or artistic avocations. Her great-grandfather, the "Boston Rebel" already referred to, was a lawyer, but he found time not only to contribute to the papers but also to engage in horticultural pursuits. His greenhouse in Roxbury, Mass., contained the first orchids grown in America, and Miss Lowell is still in possession of a number of large azalea bushes which were brought to this country and presented to him by the famous French landscape gardener Michaux. Miss Lowell's grandfather, John Amory Lowell, a pioneer in the New England cotton industry and first Trustee of the now famous Lowell Institute, was also a horticulturist by avocation, and the Roxbury place, "Broomley Vale," which he inherited from his father, was renowned for its gardens and glass houses. On the Brookline place where Miss Lowell now lives, her father, Augustus Lowell, carried on the horticultural traditions of the family. Though he too was a business man, he found time personally to plan the extensive gardening about the place and to do much of the superintending himself.

At least two qualities appear in Miss Lowell's poetry which are markedly atavistic; namely, the

vigor of mind which has caused her to have so many keen interests in life, and her love of gardens and garden flowers.

There have been many kinds of nature poets, but none exactly like Miss Lowell. She is the poet of that nature which is the product of landscape gardening and architecture. As we go through her pages, we find ourselves in old secluded gardens where fountains play into cool basins, paths wind among statues and flowering shrubbery, and marble steps lead to shady garden seats. Her poems are sweet-scented with narcissus:

" all the daffodils
Are blowing and the bright blue squills."

And no wonder, with three generations of horticulturists behind her! She has lived her whole life in the atmosphere of ancestral garden flowers, and the visitor at her house to-day will notice the greenhouses and will be delighted by the many vases of flowers which cover her tables and fill the rooms with their fragrance.

Miss Lowell's mother, who was Miss Katharine Bigelow Lawrence, daughter of Abbott Lawrence, at one time Minister to the Court of St. James, was an accomplished musician and linguist, speaking five languages, singing, and playing three instruments. Miss Lowell was supposed to get her early education in the private schools, but her real teacher was her mother, and to her we may trace Miss Lowell's thorough grounding in the French language, and, devel-

oping from this, her deep interest in French literature and history.

Miss Lowell was born in Brookline, Mass., February 9, 1874. It was thirty-six years before her first poem appeared in print, and thirty-eight years before her first volume was published, yet her career as a poet may be said to have started in childhood when she began storing up impressions, to which she showed an early and extreme sensitiveness. The importance of the years previous to her recognition is evident.

The first of the two periods into which these years were naturally divided extended from early childhood to the year 1902, and was the period of unconscious assimilation and of finding herself. She wrote verses when she was thirteen, and at an early age had vague aspirations toward story-writing. Her literary impulses, however, indicated nothing precocious, as they were still indeterminate and by no means occupied first place in her thoughts. Her energies found an outlet for the most part in such healthy pastimes as tennis and horseback riding, in her devotion to the animals on her father's place, and in reading many books in the large family library.

When she was eight years old she was taken to Europe and was whirled in true American style through Scotland, England, France, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Germany, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Her mind was greatly stimulated by the new and swiftly changing impressions, some of which, enhanced by such imaginary fears as all children

know, recurred for months afterward with unpleasant vividness. When she was twenty-one her mother died, and the next year she went abroad again. The winter of 1897-98 she passed on the Nile, and the following winter on a fruit ranch in El Cajon, California. This is typical of the variety of experience which it has been her good fortune to have had since childhood. In fact, her innate New Englandism has been tempered by much foreign travel, for the summers of 1899 and 1905 she again passed in Europe, and during the winter and spring of 1908 she went to Greece and Turkey. After the death of her father in 1900, she purchased the family place in Brookline, and for a while devoted herself to educational and library work in the interests of the town. But about this time she began quite strongly to feel the poetic impulse, and definitely settled down in 1902 to the business of being a poet.

This year, then, marks her entrance upon the second period of her artistic career. She had fully decided that poetry was her natural mode of expression, and for eight long years we find her serving a solitary and faithful apprenticeship, reading the masters, learning the technique of poetry, and developing her genius by constant exercise. It was a discouraging struggle, for she was her only critic, but to this fact is undoubtedly due much of her individuality and excellence. Spending her time mostly between Brookline and her summer place in Dublin, N.H., she wrote many poems, but resolutely postponed all publication till she should be quite sure of

herself. Her first published poem appeared in the "Atlantic Monthly," for August, 1910. Two years later her first volume of poetry came out.

"A Dome of Many-Coloured Glass" was a typical first book in that it contained various poems of the sort which every poet must write before fully realizing his own individuality. But it is this very fact which gives the volume much of its human quality. In Miss Lowell's later books this quality is more veiled by the Imagistic method, but the moment we recognize the method we find ourselves penetrating to the human part of her. Many of the poems in her first book foreshadowed the vividness of image presentation, the firmness of touch, and the imaginative power, which make her later volumes so peculiarly her own.

It is worth remarking that the volume opens with a sort of free verse poem. Yet, when this poem was written, *vers libre* had not broken into the magazines and "Imagism" was a word not heard of. Miss Lowell had already been reaching certain independent conclusions about tendencies in the poetic art and had experimented in the free forms and the possibilities of a more vivid imagery. One of the poems she had written, but not published, was "In a Garden."

Upon visiting England again in 1913 it was natural that she should have been drawn to the Imagists, just then crystallizing into a school. She met Ezra Pound, and soon discovered that the tenets of the Imagists were essentially the same which she had evolved from her own consideration of the subject.

For the strengthening of these tenets in the public mind, she agreed to join forces with the Imagists. "In a Garden" was included in the first Imagist Anthology, "Des Imagistes," published in the spring of 1914 under the imprint of Albert and Charles Boni, New York. Since then she has been a regular contributor to the annual Imagist Anthology, "Some Imagist Poets," published by Houghton Mifflin Company, in 1915-16-17. But no one who is at all acquainted with Miss Lowell's poetry can think of her primarily as an Imagist. She is primarily herself.

Before the appearance of her second book Miss Lowell had occasion to visit Europe again, this time partly in behalf of Imagism, which was growing by leaps. About this time, also, she undertook by request the authorized translation of Edmond Rostand's "Pierrot qui Pleure et Pierrot qui Rit," which was given as an opera in Boston in February, 1915, with Maggie Teyte in the rôle of Columbine.

Miss Lowell's second volume of poetry, "Sword Blades and Poppy Seed," published in 1914, proved to be one of the literary events of the year. Though it is her first volume to contain *vers libre* and Imagism fully conscious of itself as such, there is ample evidence of her respect for the classics. We find free verse and sonnets; pictorial pieces and lyrics; long narratives in rhymed couplets or stanzas, with a flavor of romance and mystery; imagistic cameos; and, perhaps most important of all, the first examples of "polyphonic prose" which have ever appeared in this language.

3. in C. -

It has now been amply proved that free verse is not a new thing in poetry. But "polyphonic prose" is new and never pretended otherwise. True, it has certain French prototypes in the work of Paul Fort and Saint-Pol-Roux, but it is a debatable question whether these would ever have affected our literature had not Miss Lowell detected their possibilities. // The name "polyphonic prose," which Miss Lowell owes to Mr. John Gould Fletcher, refers merely to the prose form in which this kind of poetry is printed. The rhythm of "polyphonic prose" is an ever-changing succession of all the rhythms to be found existing by themselves in simpler poetry. There are the metric rhythms (dactylic, iambic, trochaic, anapestic, etc.), and the free verse rhythms (called cadences). Each of these should be employed in its proper place to express the particular mood or situation or effect required. Sometimes there are key rhythms which recur at intervals like visible parts of a thread woven through the whole fabric. // Rhythmically, "polyphonic prose" is the most elastic of all the poetic forms, and is especially adapted to the treatment of subjects having many phases or aspects, or epic or dramatic subjects, or subjects that need to be presented in a series. The rhythmic effect is orchestral, not simple. In "polyphonic prose" we find that rhyme also is employed in a new way. Instead of being an emphatic or special part of the poem or a convenient device, like the bars in music, it occurs unexpectedly and subtly, ridding the movement of all sound monotony. This is one of the facts which

make "polyphonic prose" the most natural form which has yet been evolved, allowing the poet, as it does, to adapt his music at will to each new feeling and situation, and to cover all phases of a complex and many-sided subject.

Many people enjoyed "Sword Blades and Poppy Seed" who had never cared much for poetry. This is undoubtedly because, in such poems as "The Great Adventure of Max Breuck" and "The Book of Hours of Sister Clotilde," Miss Lowell proved herself an excellent story-teller, and because the picture element in some of her other poems pleases the eye in much the same way that pictures themselves do. For this reason there are many artists among Miss Lowell's admirers. In her power to see and reveal pictures in all their dazzling color and connotation is implied a close bending to nature which poets of the preceding epochs have never developed to quite the Imagistic degree. It requires a sort of scientific imagination, and this is one of Miss Lowell's very special gifts. In her late brother, Dr. Percival Lowell, the famous astronomer and discoverer of the canals on Mars, we find the same gift exercised in scientific rather than in artistic directions.

(During the winter of 1915-16 Miss Lowell gave many lectures on poetry in Boston, New York and Chicago, and published a number of critical articles as well as poems in the magazines. For some years she had been drinking deep at the wells of French poetry.) After the publication of her second book she was called upon to answer so many questions that

it can almost be said she had the business of being a critic thrust upon her. Her critical studies of the French poets, and her own thorough schooling in creative work, had made her well fitted for the task.

Her third book, then, was a book of critical essays, "Six French Poets."¹¹ Few criticisms of to-day are at once so penetrating and such good reading,—for Miss Lowell makes us live and breathe with each of her six poets, and finds room for many shrewd and entertaining observations about the ways of poets in general. Many pages in the back of the book are devoted to her translations of the more important poems of each man. This in itself is a valuable contribution to our literature, and many of her translations will doubtless become standard.

¹¹ Miss Lowell's next volume, one of poetry, "Men, Women and Ghosts," was published in the autumn of 1916. As stated in the preface, it contains narratives and pictures only, though these terms have been stretched to allow a variety of poetic effects. There is pleasing evidence that her Imagistic powers have not waned; her touch has grown firmer without losing its delicacy; and she has developed "polyphonic prose" to a finer point. Among the most notable poems are "The Cross-Roads," "Malmaison," "The Hammers" and "Patterns." The "Cross-Roads" is a powerful polyphonic in which the dramatic effects are strangely secured through ghostly atmospheres. The next two are long narratives, "Malmaison" being in "polyphonic prose" and "The Hammers" in a fluent, rhymed *vers libre*, but added to the purely

narrative element is an epic and dramatic element which has never heretofore been successfully employed by an American poet. "Patterns," which is lyric in feeling, is a poem of notable power and beauty, and must always live as a refutation of the claim that Imagism "does not reach the emotions." In addition to these should be mentioned the four poems, composing "The Overgrown Pasture" group, which are remarkable for their adaptation of authentic New England or Yankee dialect to rhythmic free verse. One would not suppose that dialect could be true to life and also rhythmic, but it is — here. The innate tragedy of these pictures of New England country life is the more telling because of the utter simplicity and realism with which they are drawn.

¶ Miss Lowell's fifth and latest book, "Tendencies in Modern American Poetry," published in October, 1917, is, as the name implies, another book of critical essays. Everybody knows the feeling which is sometimes provoked by absolute simplicity in a poem; the reader exclaims "Why, I could have written it myself!" — knowing well that these simple effects are the very hardest to achieve. This same feeling is provoked by Miss Lowell's new book of criticism; the reader wonders why the new poetry movement has hitherto seemed such a confusing jumble. Thanks to the perspective afforded by a few years, and to Miss Lowell, the true and significant aspects of the new movement are being separated from the false and meaningless aspects, the "fringe" is being clipped, and the loose ends are being pulled out and thrown

away. As we have remarked, it seems so simple — when analyzed by Miss Lowell.

She sees in the new movement only three vital tendencies, and chooses six poets who best exemplify these tendencies. They are Robinson and Frost (representing realism, direct speech and the non-militant spirit in art), Masters and Sandburg (representing realism, direct speech and the reforming, militant spirit), and John Gould Fletcher and "H. D." (representing the Imagist principles, romanticism, and that peace of mind as regards social and ethical ideas for which the militants are still fighting). This volume is the first which has appeared dealing with the modern poetry renaissance, and for this reason is extremely important. It not only elucidates the new movement with masterly good sense, but is valuable as a series of critical biographies of six of our most important living poets. In preparing this book Miss Lowell used facts furnished and authorized by each poet himself, and has carefully analyzed the poetry of each, giving copious quotations.

What is the all-inclusive quality which has enabled Miss Lowell to exert such a stimulating effect upon the minds of contemporary poetry lovers? She is concerned with "the best that is known and thought in the world." It is her inherent New England culture expressing itself in terms of the new age. Provincialism and Puritanism have given way to cosmopolitanism and the liberal outlook, without any sacrifice of good literary taste and respect for the best traditions// The New England poet has always been fore-

most in representing the peculiar spirit of his time. It was the New England poet who not only nurtured the traditions of the mother country before America had realized its nationalism, but who first figured forth the objects and ideas which were peculiarly American. Coming down to our own day, "it is (to quote from Miss Lowell herself) an interesting commentary on the easy scorn with which non-New Englanders regard New England that two of the six poets (whom she discusses as the most significant of the day) should be of the very bone and sinew of New England." These two are, of course, Robinson and Frost. There is a third whom Miss Lowell does not mention, namely, herself.

1917.

AMY LOWELL

The Last Three Books

BY ROYALL H. SNOW

IN the career of every poet there comes a time of fullest expansion, a time when the constructive work is all done and after which further production, fine though it may be, represents only a tilling of old fields which have already produced richly. With Miss Lowell that time has not come. Each new volume of hers shows the technical mastery of those that had preceded it: each has the same fire and color in its phrases, each the same rhythmical control, each the same sheer instinct for the beauty of things; but every volume reveals this old technical power applied to new themes, moving out and making new fields her own.

It was with reason that Professor William Lyon Phelps declared in the "Bookman" that "the versatility of Amy Lowell is so notable that it would be vain to predict the nature of her future production, or to attempt to set a limit to her range. . . . In spite of her assured position in contemporary literature, one feels that her career is only beginning." There had been indications in "Men, Women, and Ghosts" of Miss Lowell's control of the novel verse form of Polyphonic Prose; there had been no hint that she

was so soon to apply it, as she did in "Can Grande's Castle" to themes of such significance as the meeting of Western civilization with that of the East, or of the crumbling of great empires before the inroads of time. "Can Grande's Castle" warned us that Miss Lowell had preserved the flexibility of her genius, yet, after its epic sweep, we scarcely expected that she could turn at once to such genuine and delicate lyricism as goes to make up "Pictures of the Floating World." And the next volume also carried its surprise and thrill. We knew Miss Lowell's power of recreating the spirit of other times and places: we did not expect an entire volume devoted to evoking the spirit of vanished peoples. And yet that is what her latest book, "Legends," does, and does superbly.

But to turn back to "Can Grande's Castle," the first of these remarkable volumes to appear. In "Can Grande's Castle" there were only four poems, all written in polyphonic prose. Presenting as it did only polyphonic prose, and polyphonic prose carried to its farthest development, it was a provocative book, fruitful of discussion. The opening poem, "Sea-Blue and Blood-Red," has for its subject the great and tragic love affair between Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton, but beneath the swift and brilliant narrative, rolls an undertone, now sharp, now sonorous — the dramatic clash of desire and duty which is the real theme of the poem. Two excellent portraits are here, the sturdy-hearted, impulsive Admiral, and "quivering, blood-swept, vivid Lady Hamilton." They are overdone in no particular, they are simply

understood. Starting in the revolution-rocked Kingdom of the Two Sicilies with the red heart of Vesuvius smoking behind them, their story works inevitably through the fire of their personal triumph to the tragedy of Trafalgar. Vivid stuff it is of which this poem is made.

But rich as is "Sea-Blue and Blood-Red," to my mind the real significance of "Can Grande's Castle" lies in two poems: "The Bronze Horses" and "Guns as Keys: and the Great Gate Swings." At this point it would be possible to cavil on various matters, to ask if sometimes opulence has not been pushed to over-richness, or rhetorical emphasis to shrillness; but to raise such questions (very important though they may be so far as form is concerned) would be to distract attention from the really significant point about these two poems. Do they mark the way to the modern epic? The epic as written by Homer can never be written again: the balance of naïveté and refinement which produced him belongs to the childhood of the world. In Dante and Milton, later writers of great epics, there is a marked increase of the subjective element. The subjective is characteristic of the poetry of sophisticated peoples — carried far, it is hostile to the spirit of the original epic. If we are to continue in the subjective vein, as we must unless by a miracle the world can become young again, the question arises: are we thereby automatically forbidden epic themes? Perhaps the answer to that question lies in two of the poems of "Can Grande's Castle."

"Guns as Keys: and the Great Gate Swings" deals with the opening of Japan by Commodore Perry, with the meeting of two civilizations; surely a theme epic in sweep if there ever was one. But whereas in the old epic attention would have been focussed on the bare narrative of a sequence of events, in Miss Lowell's poem there is not only a genuine power in the handling of dramatic action, but there is also a heavy emphasis on the play of two contrasting national temperaments: on the subjective elements which lie before and beyond the action. It is that attitude of approach, rather than the form, or the pointillistic technique, which is significant in Miss Lowell's handling of these themes. It points the way to the lyrical as opposed to the austere epic.

But quite aside from its literary interest, "Guns as Keys" is excellent reading for itself, with its delicate handling of the lacquer-work civilization of Japan as an opposite of the bluff Yankee nature which sends steam frigates shouldering against distant seas in pursuit of trade. "Hedge Island," another of the four poems in the volume, good as it is in its way, cannot compare with "Guns as Keys" in power. It is only in "The Bronze Horses," the last poem in the book, that we find anything comparable to "Guns as Keys." In "The Bronze Horses" Miss Lowell again treats a major theme, for these bronze horses, which have had so varied a career in the world, become in the poem the symbol of eternal time treading down the centuries. Untouched and serene they look down upon the greatness and decay

of three empires. They see a Roman triumph; they see Byzantium sacked by the crusaders; they see Venice mistress of the Mediterranean, and Venice impotent. The poem is largely conceived, and, if it be not so firmly handled as "Guns as Keys," it is because the richness of detail sometimes blurs the main outlines of the poem. For Miss Lowell has a fine passion for the vivid and sparkling. It is small wonder Professor John Livingston Lowes declared (in "Convention and Revolt in Poetry") that "'Can Grande's Castle' challenges through its vividness, and contagious zest in life and color, an unreluctant admiration" — a vividness and zest he feels native to Miss Lowell.

To some readers who, in spite of the fineness of "Guns as Keys," could not escape a lurking fear inspired by the intricate novelty of the form and the very opulence of "Can Grande's Castle" as a whole, Miss Lowell's next book, "Pictures of the Floating World," published in 1919, came as a delight. It is one of those rare volumes that you can pick up and open at random, — sure of coming upon beautiful pages; it is one of those still more rare volumes to which you can return, sure that the glamorous illusion of its poetry will not be dispelled by re-reading.

"Pictures of the Floating World" is purely a book of lyrics. The first two sections of the volume, "Lacquer Prints" and "Chinoiseries" deal with Japanese and Chinese themes. They are delicately done, capturing the fragility of atmosphere the poet seeks.

The "Lacquer Prints" particularly are, in their briefness, saturate with the pure emotion of beauty. The rest of the book, and the greater part of it, deals with subjects nearer home: people, places, the poet herself.

The technique of these poems is that of the true modernist. The poet perceives the world keenly and sensitively: she presents it objectively to the reader. All the overtones of deep feeling, that *sine qua non* of poetry, are present, but they do not crowd into the poems in blurred comments and moralistic tag-endings. The poems are distinct and brilliant in their presentation of surfaces: but it is a dull reader indeed who does not feel the surge of emotion beneath. A fine piece in this respect is "Vernal Equinox" with its building up of the feeling of spring out of the scent of hyacinths and the quivering of candles in the warm wet wind, until the emotion of the poem breaks out in that poignant last line. "The Letter," which also has justly been a favorite with readers of poetry, is a companion piece in emotion to "Vernal Equinox." Again it is the fierceness of longing for the absent one which gives the poem its intensity, and it is the rhythmically objective treatment which gives it force. We feel with the poet that while all about is drenched in the scalding lustre of the moon, such love-emotion cannot be compressed into the "Little cramped words" of a letter. And this ability which Miss Lowell has of making the reader identify himself with the poem is one of the secrets of her power. No reader of her books can be merely an onlooker at a

display of feeling — he is drawn irresistibly in and made a sharer of the poetic emotion.

“Solitaire,” with its elfish delight in the unconstrainedly lovely, has a charm peculiar to itself, and “Madonna of the Evening Flowers” is so well known as scarcely to need the bush of praise. Her garden is always an inspiration to Miss Lowell and in the “Madonna of the Evening Flowers,” where it is made the setting for a poem of direct personal feeling, she has written one of her best lyrics. As another poet has said of it: “‘Madonna of the Evening Flowers,’ a poem so peaceful that to read it is to feel rest.” There are other poems, widely varied in nature, which deserve comment there is not space to give — “Veniens Transiens,” “Summer Rain,” “On a Certain Critic,” “A Shower” and many more. And perhaps better than any of these I have mentioned, there is “Appuldurcombe Park” with its fundamental passion and despair. But with this volume one might praise endlessly!

The high quality of Miss Lowell’s work has brought her recognition throughout the country. The events of her life during these years have been mainly bound up with her constant literary work, original and critical, and with the honors it has brought her. Numerous universities, anxious to learn something of the new movement, have asked her to read and the success of these readings, emphasizing as they do inspired fashion the fact that the new poetry is meant for the ear, has been remarkable. Miss Lowell’s reading is an art in itself, a complementary art to that of

her poetry. No one who has heard her can ever forget the experience. Twice Miss Lowell has been invited, by Tufts in May, 1918, and by Columbia in June, 1920, to give the Phi Beta Kappa poem. By Columbia she was made an honorary member of the New York Delta of the Phi Beta Kappa Society — an honor very rarely accorded to a woman. And in the same month she was given the degree of Doctor of Literature by Baylor University of Waco, Texas.

"Legends," the latest of Miss Lowell's books, appeared in May, 1921. A legend, as she makes clear in her preface, means not simply a story, but an expression of man's curiosity about both the natural world and his own strange mind: in the primitive ages he is conscious of this curiosity, and, as a measure of true or merely speculative understanding comes to him, he expresses it through the medium of a legend. This need of explaining external phenomena, or unaccountable action, is the basis of the true legend everywhere. In Miss Lowell's "A Legend of Porcelain," for example, the disasters which fall on the porcelain maker are attributed to the intervention of demons — an intervention only possible because his daughter has neglected certain superstitious rites. "Memorandum Confided by a Yucca to a Passion-Vine" is based upon another, and very common type of legend. Primitive man saw that there were spots on the clear silver of the moon and felt the need of explaining the phenomenon; in this case the spots are attributed to the marks made by the paws of a satyr-fox who attacked the moon-god.

dess on her descent to earth. We have a better understanding now of the shadows in the moon, but such legends are perennially attractive; they are rooted in our race consciousness.

The first poem in the volume, "Memorandum Confided by a Yucca to a Passion-Vine," is based, as I mentioned, on the fox story, with the Peru of the Incas for a setting. It is done with Miss Lowell's customary use of sumptuous detail, but with a touch (as the title would indicate) of faintly quizzical humor at the adventures of the love-distracted fox seeking — alas! — the moon. The scenes in *The Temple of the Sun* are typical of Miss Lowell's workmanship. The garden is rich, not with natural flowers, but with blossoms and fruits carefully wrought out of precious metals and jewels. Even the butterflies are of turquoise and the lizards of silver. The Temple itself is of gold, so built that the light of the sun bursts at daybreak, while the priests chant, on the image of the god. The sunrise scene at *The Temple* is one of the best parts of the poem. Complementing it are the fine passages describing the dance of the Inca mothers in the garden at night, and the descent of the luminous moon-goddess into the centre of the ring they form.

The North American Indian is represented by two legends. "Funeral Song for the Indian Chief Blackbird" is, I believe, very close to the Indian spirit in its picturing of the burial of the dead chieftain on his living horse. But important as it may be in an effort to preserve some memory of a dying race, the

"Funeral Song" is not equal in imaginative or symbolic power to the other poem in this group. "Many Swans" (which, by the by, was the Columbia Phi Beta Kappa poem) is written in a form of polyphonic prose modified from its extreme development in "The Bronze Horses." The rhythm is flowing, rather than staccato, and the rhyme recurrence less frequent. With the less obvious use of rhyme the polyphonic form seems to gain in musical value: a delicate chiming is substituted for the decisive bell-ringing effect of "The Bronze Horses." Scattered through the poem are rhymed and unrhymed free verse songs following the Indian manner — some of them in fact being actual translations — which vary the metrical pattern; "The Nation's Drum has Fallen Down" is one of the finest lyrics which Miss Lowell has ever done, and in a *genre* quite new to her. Many Swans is the warrior who mounted to the sky on a ladder of arrows and forgot the earth for what he found there. But at the time of the spring salmon-running he remembered his family and desired to return. The gift, reluctantly given by the old woman called The-One-Who-Walks-All-Over-the-Sky, which he brought back to earth with him, the gift of absolute power, proves a gift of fire. Mortals may not crave omnipotence and, achieving it, expect to mingle unchanged with men. Against his will, wherever Many Swans goes, he brings destruction; and, as the fire he brings sears those he meets, the fire of loneliness sears him. At last The-One-Who-Walks-All-Over-the-Sky appears: "Her eyes were moons for

sadness, and her voice was like the coiling of the sea;" and frees him from the gift that was a curse. Again, this legend, in Miss Lowell's hands, becomes the tale of the extinction of the Indian races, one after another, before the furious march of superior strength and overweening ambition.

"Witch-Woman," also an Indian legend but this time of Yucatan, is one of the best poems of the book and, for that matter, that Miss Lowell has ever written. All her power of sharp visualization is needed to bring out the potentialities of the scene where the witch dances naked in the moonlight on the cliff edge with the sea curling, white-fanged, far below; and Miss Lowell makes the most of her material with a truly soul-satisfying adequacy. Again, at the moment when the flesh falls away and there is left a skeleton dancing, sharp against the red moon, all the delicacy of her touch is needed to keep the poem from shifting into the grotesque. But the finesse of touch is there — the macabre is Miss Lowell's forte — and the poem is kept with sure artistry in the correct tone. And I cannot but mention the last two lines of the poem. They are simplicity itself and they are pure inspiration. One has to look far in English poetry for a conclusion which sums up so perfectly and so powerfully the body of the poem it ends. The conclusion of Browning's "My Last Duchess" is the only comparison that comes to my mind.

The "Gavotte in D Minor" is another poem in this volume which shows Miss Lowell's artistry at

its very best. The poem is too intricately wrought to be thoroughly analyzed here. But from the significant title (an integral part of the poem as every good title is) to the very last line, every word shows the mastery of her workmanship. The skilful way in which she makes fresh the old love-and-above rhyme, the flexibility of the rhythm, the delicate chime of the music: they are all evidence of her control of the poetic medium.

But no poet, alive or dead, can consistently maintain a level throughout an entire volume. In "Confided by a Yucca" there is a slight tendency to let details blur the main outline of the poem (a fault which Miss Lowell fell into in the earlier "The Bronze Horses") and in "A Legend of Porcelain" the fault recurs. Yet, so characteristic of Miss Lowell's manner is the exquisite workmanship of this latter poem, I believe it will be one of the best liked in the volume. Potentially it is the most dainty in sentiment, based, as it is, on the legend of the beautiful girl who, absorbed in beauty and love, neglected the rites which would have kept the demons at bay, and later redeemed her error with labor and pain before the fiery porcelain furnaces. But the poet is so entranced with the fragile beauty, the color and gracefulness of the porcelains which Chou-Kiou paints, and the exotic loveliness of the Chinese civilization, that sometimes she seems to let description overweight the poem. Taken one by one such passages are equal to some of the best of Miss Lowell's short lyrics: but in so long a poem our capacity to react to

the dainty loveliness is over-taxed, unless perchance the reader fall in love, as the poet has done, with the very detail, and many readers will do just this.

There are two other groups of legends to comment upon, those of a European setting of which "Gavotte in D Minor" is one, and those of New England. One is tempted to exclaim at the insatiable curiosity concerning mankind which has led Miss Lowell into so many fields, and to wonder at her power of making them equally vivid.

"Dried Marjoram" is the old story of Rizpah, retold, and retold by a completely modern poet. If one were asked to define wherein present-day poetry differs from the poetry of the Victorian period, one could best explain by example, and a trenchant example would be a comparison between "Dried Marjoram" and Tennyson's "Rizpah." At the time of writing her poem, Miss Lowell had never read Tennyson's, as the "Atlantic" pointed out when it published "Dried Marjoram." The poem attained instant success, and indeed it is one of the most poignantly human things that Miss Lowell has written.

It is said that every poet must try his hand at a ballad at least once in his life. Miss Lowell's ballad is "The Ring and the Castle." Nothing could show the poet's mastery over form better than this poem. When it appeared anonymously in the "Bookman"'s guessing-the-author contest, some years ago, it entirely baffled the critics. It is so absolutely a ballad in substance and in form. Miss Lowell has said that it came out of her inner consciousness with no proto-

type that she can remember, which only proves how closely related are primitive and modern man. Mediæval in subject, treatment, and measure, "The Ring and the Castle" is nevertheless universal, because true to the perennial humanity of man.

Considered as pure narrative, "The Statue in the Garden" is excellent. Set in the Europe of the present day with a strong undercurrent of Eighteenth Century feeling, the form of the poem is well suited to the material. The rather tight rhyming couplets fit the Eighteenth Century motif, and the shifts into free verse give variation and a modern contrast before the couplet has time to weary. In the case of a narrative it is not fair to tell the story: it must be found in the original, for "The Statue in the Garden" is told with a zest and piquancy which cannot be transposed. It is a study in psychology, with insanity beckoning the hero farther and farther on through his very love of the beautiful, and of the final surge of human emotion by which he is released.

"Four Sides to a House," the last poem in the book (there are eleven all told), appeals to me as the better of the two New England poems. Miss Lowell's power in the handling of the macabre is again called into full play along with her dramatic force. The stanza employed is admirably adapted to her purposes; she utilizes the crescendo quality of three successive rhymed lines to bring each stanza to a wave-crest of power, and then drives home the effect with a final unrhymed line of an abrupter rhythm. But technical dexterity in the handling of stanza cannot alone make

a poem satisfying. A poem is something more than its form and Miss Lowell achieves that something necessary to make "Four Sides to a House" a really fine poem. The restrained note of terror is well sustained and brought to a climax in the fear of the murderers as they kill their last horse — no ghostly thing can pass a horse's skull, but they have only three horses. And the monosyllabic simplicity of the conclusion is equal to the rest: it is not easy to round off effectively a poem of this nature, but Miss Lowell does it.

There is little doubt that "Legends" will be as enthusiastically received as was "Pictures of the Floating World." ~~Miss Lowell's career has been a steady rise, each volume holding old friends and winning new, and there is no sign that the crest has yet been reached.~~ "Legends" shows all her fertility of invention, all her sensitiveness to the beauty of delicate things, all her power of colorful envisioning, all her sense of the dramatic, all her sympathy with humanity . . . just those qualities in fact which have not only made her famous, but have made her work beloved by all lovers of poetry. When "Can Grande's Castle" appeared, Joseph E. Chamberlin exclaimed in "The Boston Transcript" "We have come to it — once Poe was the living and commanding poet, whose things were waited for. . . . Now we watch and wait for Amy Lowell's poems." And as "Pictures of the Floating World" was worth waiting and watching for, so was "Legends." It has the freshness of the ~~young and the skill of the practiced artist.~~

BOOKS BY
AMY LOWELL

Poetry

LEGENDS

vitality, in her zest for the new and unexplored, in the superb technical skill with which she interprets the restless and searching spirit of humanity, Miss Lowell mirrors, as does no other poet, the soul of the present age.

LEGENDS, her new volume, will delight not only poetry lovers, but all who enjoy narratives, swiftly moving, vividly coloured, and brimming with passion and beauty.

PICTURES OF THE FLOATING WORLD
CAN GRANDE'S CASTLE
MEN, WOMEN AND GHOSTS
SWORD BLADES AND POPPY SEED
A DOME OF MANY-COLOURED GLASS

*Each \$2.00, except "A DOME OF MANY-COLOURED GLASS,"
which is \$1.75*

Prose

TENDENCIES IN MODERN AMERICAN POETRY
SIX FRENCH POETS

Each \$3.50

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
4 PARK ST., BOSTON 16 E. 40TH ST., NEW YORK

AMY LOWELL

Some international opinion of her work

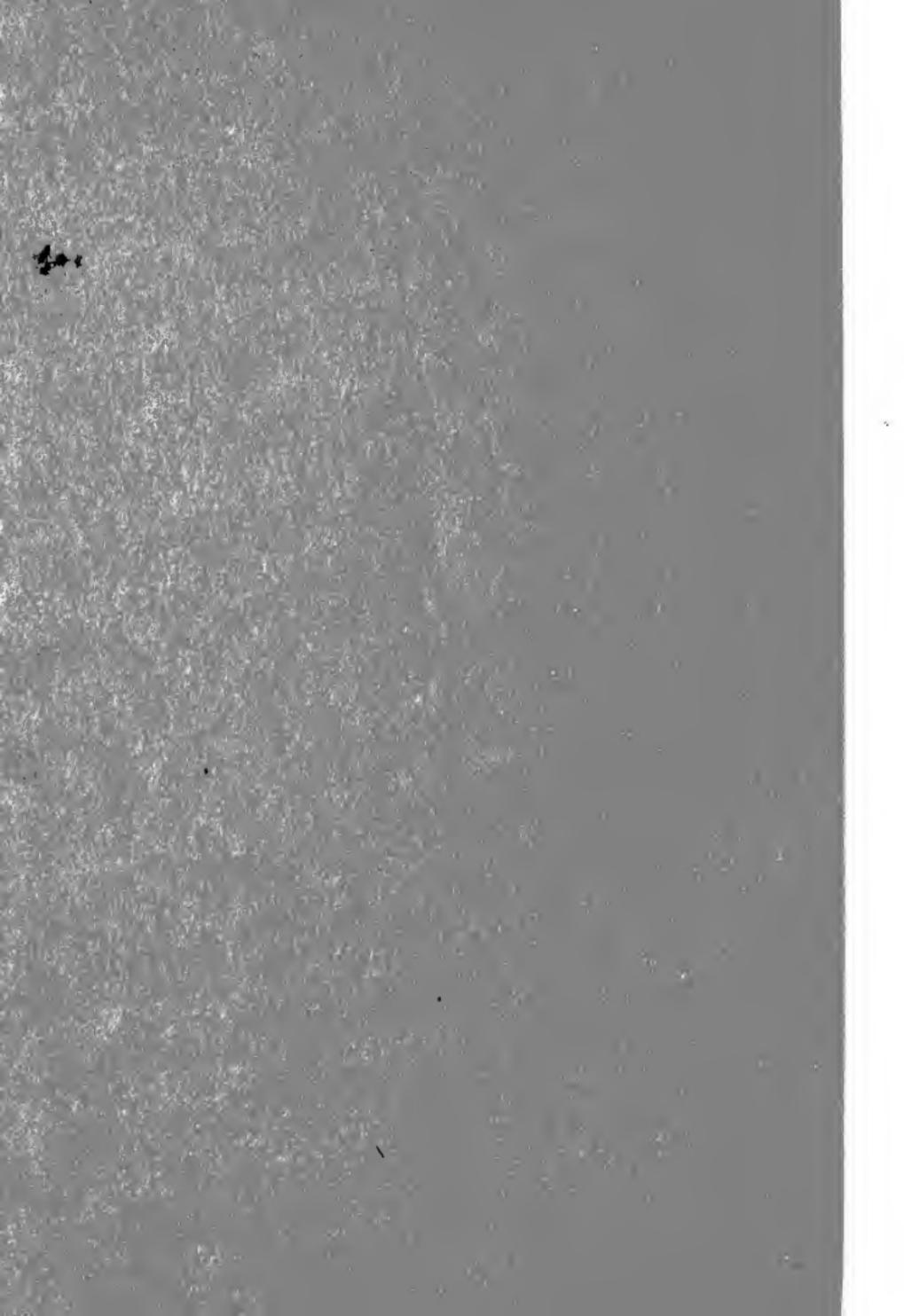
“Amy Lowell brings a new spark to American poetry. . . . Her poetry is luxuriant, interwoven, delicate, like the braided park in Spring. . . . Amy Lowell represents, in the United States, an already subtle civilization.” — JEAN LAFON in the *Mercure de France*.

“Miss Amy Lowell’s latest books are splendid. . . . She is undoubtedly one of the really great American poets of our day.” — JOHN DRINKWATER.

“Walt Whitman and Amy Lowell are the most widely known American poets (in Japan).” — YONE NOGUCHI, Professor of English Literature at Keio Gijuku University, Tokyo.

“The poise of Miss Lowell’s work is the poise of strength, the first poet of our struggling age with a rounded culture, European masters, and with the aptitude like them to look back to the past, embrace the present turmoil of affairs, and yet hold her grip upon her art.” — WALDO FRANK in *Our American Authors*.





14 DAY USE
RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED

LOAN DEPT.

This book is due on the last date stamped
on the date to which renewed.

Renewed books are subject to immediate

RECD LD	31 JUN
FEB 13 1961	
AUTO DISC CIRC	APR 29 '63
230-53517 REC DATED	
JUL 1 7 '65 - 4 PM	
DEC 6 19	FEB 30 1968
6 May '68 REG CIRG	FEB 27 1968
AUTO DISC	MAR 1 7 '68
LIBRARY USE	NOV 6 '68
MAR 16 1964	DECEMBER 1968
RECD LD	
MAR 16 '64-7 PM	

